

Read: Acts 16:1-4

The Acts of the Apostles
"Truth on Fire"

Introduction

God tells us in Isaiah 55:8-9 *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

"Faith with works" and "Faith without works"

We must clearly understand the two principles the Spirit of God lays down for us in these two passages Acts 15:1-29 and Acts 16:1-4.

The first in chapter 15 was that prior to Salvation:-

Faith + Works for Salvation = NO SALVATION

The second in chapter 16 that after Salvation:-

Faith + No Works after Salvation = NO SALVATION

Circumcision

To understand the meaning of anything in scripture apply "the law of first mention". Find the first mention; it will illuminate the meaning of the word/phrase.

Circumcision, first mentioned in Genesis 17:10, was a sign of God's Covenant. Romans 4:10 tells us that the covenant was first established in uncircumcision then within the covenant circumcision was instituted as a **sign** of the covenant and a **seal** of the righteousness of faith.

We are therefore learning that circumcision is both a sign and a seal. Looking at each of these:-

- (i) The Physical (outward) Sign – is in obedience to God's command. The symbolism here is striking and rich with meaning. Two of the lessons are:-
 - 1 From the God-ward side. The covenant is irreversible. God's covenant is an eternal, an everlasting covenant. When the Almighty God brings us into a covenant relationship with Him He will keep us forever.
 - 2 From the man-ward side. The covenant demands obedience and submission to God's Will. This covenant relationship with God is not according to our will but His Will. *"If you love me keep my commandments"* said Jesus.
- (ii) The Spiritual (inward) Seal – of the righteousness of faith. A golden rule to understanding scripture – the Bible is its own interpreter: (we should not try to apply earthly wisdom no matter how great). Romans 4:11 reveals the spiritual work. This is not symbolism, but the work of God's grace. Note the order is reversed.
 - 1 From the man-ward side Faith. Abraham was justified by faith (Heb 11). Faith is the key for *"without faith it is impossible to please God"*. Heb 11:6
 - 2 From the God-ward side imputation. God imputed to Abraham righteousness. The picture here is that God clothed him with His own

righteousness. There are two types of righteousness mentioned in the Bible: imputed and practical. This refers to imputed righteousness that is the God-given righteousness not earned, but gifted. Practical righteousness is when we in obedience to God's command obey His Will and walk in His Ways and become more like Him.

Some Questions:

- 1 Why is works after Salvation O.K., but for Salvation wrong?
- 2 Give a few examples of what some count as "works towards salvation" to day?
- 3 Give a few examples of works resulting from salvation?
- 4 Is there a parallel to circumcision in the church taught in the New Testament?
- 5 Why was it only males that were circumcised? (Looking for the Spiritual answer)
- 6 Name some things I should do in obedience to God's command if I'm a Christian?
- 7 Why did Paul circumcise Timothy after arguing that it's not necessary for salvation?
- 8 Why did Paul circumcise Timothy "because of the Jews"- was it works?
- 9 Can you think of other examples such as this to day?